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ACTION ARA-20

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SUBJ: COLOMBIAN-VENEZUELAN RELATIONS

1. THIS MORNING DR. ALBERTO LLERAS CAMARGO AND DR GERMAN ZEA HAD BREAKFAST AT THE RESIDENCE WITH AMB JOVA, DCM AND MYSELF. AFTER CONSIDERABLE DISCUSSION OF GAS WHICH MORE OR LESS TERMINATED WITH OBSERVATION OF DR. ALBERTO LLERAS THAT ALTHOUGH IT'S IMAGE HAS NEVER BEEN LOWER, THE O S IS NEVERTHELESS POLITICALLY A VITAL NECESSITY TO THE HEMISPHERE, THE SUBJECT TURNED TO COLOMBIAN-VENZEUELAN RELATIONS.

2. BOTH LLERAS AND ZEA CONSIDER THAT THE DISPUTE OVER THE BOUNDARY IN THE GULF OF VENEZUELA HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY SERIOUS DESPITE THE BEST EFFORTS OF RESPONSIBLE MEN IN BOTH COUNTRIES TO KEEP IT FROM BECOMING A "POPULAR ISSUE". AGREED INCIDENT COULD NOW CONCEIVABLE CAUSE CONFLICT. ZEA DESCRIBED AT SOME LENGTH THE POSITIONS OF BOTH COUNTRIES IN WHICH THERE WAS LITTLE THAT HAS NOT ALREADY BEEN REPORTED. HOWEVER HE DID INDICATE THAT VENEZUELA HAS TAKEN A MORE EXTREME POSITON WITH REGARD TO THE BOUNDARY (I.E. A CONTINUED PROJECTION OF ITS LAND FRONTIER OUT OVER THE GULF) THAN IT HAD ORIGINALLY ASSUMED AT THE FIRST MEETING ON THIS SUBJECT BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. AT THAT MEETING HE SAID VENEZUELAN'S WERE PREPARED TO DISCUSS A BOUNDARY RUNNING DIRECTLY OUT OVER THE GULF WHERAS COLOMBIANS

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WERE TAKING POSITION THAT BOUNDARY SHOULD RUN OUT OVER GULF AT RIGHT-ANGLE TO THE SHORE (I.E. SOUTH OF ABOVE LINE). IMPLICATION WAS THAT AT THAT TIME GOC MIGHT HAVE CONCEDED, AT LEAST IN PART, TO THIS VENEZUELAN CLAIM. PRESENT VENEZUELAN POSITION ON BOUNDARY IS CONSIDERED COMPLETELY UNACCEPTABLE GOC AND ZEA REITERATED PESSIMISM ABOUT FORTHCOMING TALKS IN ROME IN MARCH. DID EXPRESS HOPE PARTIES MIGHT AT LEAST AGREE TO MODUS VIVENDI WHICH WOULD POSTPONE REAL ISSUE FOR INDEFINITE TIME. (NOTE: UNTIL AFTER NEXT VENEZUELAN ELECTIONS WE WOULD SPECULATE.) ZEA SAID TALKS ARE SCHEDULED TO LAST ABOUT A MONTH. APROPOS CHOICE OF ROME AS SITE FOR TALKS, ZEA HAD PRESSED STRONGLY FOR NEW YORK FOR VARIETY OF PRACTICAL REASONS INCLUDING USE OF UN FACILITIES BUT VENEZUELA HD INSISTED ON ROME FOR FEAR PROXIMITY TO UN MIGHT FURTHER POSSIBILITY OF ATTEMPTED SOLUTION THROUGH THAT BODY OR OTHER INTERNATIONAL TRIBUNAL. BOTH ZEA AND LLERAS STRESSED FACT THAT IN CASE OF NUMEROUS DIFFERENCES WITH COLOMBIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES OVER PAST CENTURY OR MORE, VENEZUELA HAS LOST (OR AT LEAST FEELS IT HAS LOST) IN EVERY ARBITRATION OR OTHER FORM OF THIRD PARTY JUDGMENT.

3. WITH REGARD TO NATURE OF OFF-SHORE WATERS AND PROSPECTS FOR PETROLEUM, LLERAS COMMENTED THAT SEABED OFF COLOMBIAN SHORES IS RELATIVELY SHALLOW FOR QUITE A LONG DISTANCE OUT, WHEREAS OFF VENEZUELA, SHORE WATER QUICKLY DROPS TO MUCH GREATER DEPTHS. HE SAID "VENEZUELAN'S CONVINCED THERE IS VALUABLE OIL DEPOSIT IN DISPUTED AREA." ZEA SAID THAT MENTION OF PETROLEUM HAD NEVER BEEN MADE IN DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN COUNTRIES IN EFFORT NOT TO "PETROLIZE" THE ISSUE BUT BOTH MEN READILY AGREED THAT BASIC UNDERLYING FACTOR IS PROBABLE FACT THIS IS RICH OIL AREA. ZEA MENTIONED THAT COLOMBIA HAD GRANTED TENTATIVE CONCESSION TO AN OIL COMPANY IN THIS AREA BUT HD SUSPENDED IT IN ORDER THAT IT SHOULD NOT BE A FACTOR IN THE DISCUSSIONS AND THAT ALLEGATIONS COMING FROM VENEZUELA TO EFFECT OIL COMPANIES ARE PRESSING COLOMBIA TO GRANT CONCESSIONS BECAUSE TERMS FROM COLOMBIA WOULD PRESUMABLY BE BETTER THAN THOSE FROM VENEZUELA IS "PURA PAJA".

4. COMMENTING ON THE ATMOSPHERE OF VENEZUELA TODAY BOTH MEN STRESSED FACT MANY LEADERS IN GOVTS FOLLOWING DOWNFALL OF PEREZ JIMENEZ UNTIL THIS ONE, HAD BEEN CLOSE PERSONAL FRIENDS OF COLOMBIAN COUNTERPARTS. THEY THOUGHT IN TERMS OF "COLOMBIANS AND VENEZUELAN'S ARE THE SAME THING". THE CALDERA GOVT IS A NEW

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CROWD AND ALTHOUGH NOT HOSTILE TO GOC, TENDS TO REGARD IT AS IT WOULD ANY OTHER FOREIGN GOVT. LLERAS SAID HE HAD RECENTLY TALKED WITH VARIOUS AD LEADERS WHO HAD VISITED HIM HERE (WE PRESUME CONFIDENTIALLY). LATTER FELT THAT AD HAS GAINED CONSIDERABLE STRENGTH AND IS PRESENTLY LEADING PARTY BUT VERY MUCH DISTURBED THAT CLOSE RUNNER-UP BASED ON RECENT POLL IS PEREZ JIMENEZ. CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY STRENGTH HAS REPORTEDLY FALLEN ALTHOUGH PERSONAL POPULARITY PRES CALDERA ADMITEDLY REMAINS HIGH. LLERAS SAID PEREZ JIMENEZ IS PERFECTLY CAPABLE OF EXPLOITING BORDER ISSUE FOR OWN POLIT ENDS AS IS GEN ROJAS PINILLA IN COLOMBIA. BOTH MEN EXPRESSED FEAR THAT POLIT PRESSURES IN VENEZUELA INVOLVING BORDER ISSUE COULD LEAD TO MIL COUP WHICH COULD HAVE VERY BAD REPERCUSSION IN COLOMBIA.

5. WITH REGARD TO PROBLEM OF COLOMBIAN INDOCUMENTADOS, BOTH MEN OF OPINION THIS NDULD IN ITSELF BE QUITE READILY SETTLED AND IT H S BECOME DIFFICULT AND POSSIBLY EVEN DANGEROUS ONLY BECAUSE OF ITS CURRENT INVOLVEMENT WITH BORDER PROBLEM.

6. AT CLOSE OF CONVERSATION AMB JOVA ASKED IF EITHER GENTLEMAN SAW ANY USEFUL ROLE FOR OAS OR ANY OTHER THIRD PARTY THIS PARTICULAR STAGE. BOTH REPLIED IN NEGATIVE BUT QUICKLY ADDED THAT AT SOME FURTHER TIME SHOULD NEGOTIATORS BE ABLE TO COME UP WITH AGREED SOLUTION, OAS OR OTHER THIRD PARTY ENDORSEMENT MIGHT WELL BE EXTREMELY VALUABLE IN AIDING EITHER OR BOTH GOVTS TO SAVE FACE WITH THEIR PEOPLE OR IN HELPING TO ASSURE CONGRESIONAL RATIFICATION OF AGREEMENT.

7. COMMENT: BOTH MEN ARE CLEARLY PREOCCUPIED ABOUT SITUATION BUT IN NO WAY EMOTIONAL. ZEA SEEMED MOST SINCERE IN HIS APPROACH TO FORTHCOMING NEGOTIATIONS AND WE THINK WAS COMPLETELY FRANK WITH US. AMB JOVA URGED UTMOST EFFORT BE MADE AT FORTHCOPIVNG NEGOTIATIONS AND SAID BEST HOPE FOR SOLUTION WOULD SEEM TO BE EFFORTS BY SAGACIOUS MEN OF BOTH COUNTRIES AS REPRESENTED BY DR ZEA. GP-3.

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